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Over the last 105 years, the mixed chamber ensemble of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire* has become, in all its protean forms, a principal line-up for modern music. This paper offers a panoramic view of the musical, intercultural and historical contexts that underlie the Pierrot ensemble's enduring appeal. In particular, it falls into three main parts to scrutinise how the medium has been adopted by musicians and composers in different parts of the world. Scholars have tended to focus on either Berlin, the site of *Pierrot*'s premiere, or on Anglo-American efforts to sustain and reinterpret the medium, especially in the late twentieth century. Instead, we begin in Barcelona to examine the Pierrot ensemble as a Spanish phenomenon, from its 1925 premiere, which also marked the premiere of Anton Webern's Pierrot quintet arrangement of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony (1906/22–23), to Mercedes Zavala's Senegal-inspired *La apoteosis nocturna de Andoar* (2001). Such histories are inevitably interwoven, so the paper next probes the legacy of the Pierrot Players (1967–70, later The Fires of London), one of the most galvanising ensembles in post-war British music. A comparison of this group's wide-ranging achievements with those of Grupo Novo Horizonte de São Paulo (1988–99), Brazil's leading ensemble of the late twentieth century, can cast new light on how musical media and genres evolve. The paper therefore concludes by scrutinising how Grupo Novo Horizonte, founded by the Briton Graham Griffiths, took then outgrew the Pierrot ensemble as its cornerstone, forging a localised spectacle with a richly internationalist heritage.